

# Distribution, Status and Variation of the Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* Stephens, with Notes on the *Larus cirrocephalus* species-group

R.E. Johnstone\*

## Abstract

Data on distribution, seasonal dispersal, colour of unfeathered parts and plumage stages are given for the Silver Gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*). Geographic variation within the species is analysed. Three subspecies are recognized, *L. n. novaehollandiae* Stephens of Australia (including Tasmania), *L. n. forsteri* (Mathews) of New Caledonia, and *L. n. scopulinus* Forster of New Zealand. Hartlaub's Gull (*Larus hartlaubii* Bruch) of south-western Africa is treated as a full species. The *Larus cirrocephalus* species-group comprises four species of grey-headed and white-headed gulls from the Southern Hemisphere, *L. cirrocephalus* Vieillot, *L. hartlaubii*, *L. novaehollandiae* and *L. bulleri* Hutton.

## Introduction

In his monograph on the world's gulls, Dwight (1925) recognized five subspecies within the Silver Gull: *Larus n. novaehollandiae* from the coasts, islands and lakes of southern Australia north to Bernier Island in the west and the Five Islands in the east; *L. n. gunni* Mathews of Tasmania; *L. n. forsteri* of New Caledonia and coastal northern Australia from Port Darwin east and south to the Capricorn group; *L. n. scopulinus* of New Zealand; and *L. n. hartlaubii* of south-western Africa.

Although Dwight was hampered by a shortage of specimens and data on soft parts etc. his treatment of the Silver Gull has remained virtually unchanged to the present day. Peters (1934) followed Dwight and recognized all five of his subspecies. Condon (1975) recognized only two instead of three subspecies for the Australian region: *L. n. novaehollandiae* for Tasmania and Australia except northern Queensland, and *L. n. forsteri* for the south-west Pacific from New Caledonia west to Torres Strait and south along the eastern coast of Queensland to Mackay.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine geographic variation in Australia and to see if it can form the basis for the recognition of subspecies. To put the Australian variation in perspective it has been necessary to examine overseas populations of the Silver Gull and closely related species.

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\* Department of Ornithology and Herpetology, Western Australian Museum, Francis Street, Perth, Western Australia 6000.